**the war is over and we are beginning**

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M/M

**Fandom:**
Masters of the Air (TV 2024)

**Relationships:**
Harry Crosby/Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal, Gale "Buck" Cleven/John Clarence "Bucky" Egan, Harry Crosby & Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal, Gale "Buck" Cleven & John Clarence "Bucky" Egan

**Characters:**
Harry Crosby (1919-2010), Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal, John Clarence "Bucky" Egan, Gale "Buck" Cleven

**Additional Tags:**
Soft Harry Crosby, Soft Robert “Rosie” Rosenthal, Boys In Love, Gale Cleven’s Rosebush, Canon Compliant (but they’re gay), Romance, Fluff, Kissing, Boys Kissing, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Alternate Universe - No Girlfriends/No Wives

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English

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Part 9 of navigate me through the nightshade

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# the war is over and we are beginning

by waitingforsols

Summary

Crosby chuckled lightly. “It’s a rosebush,” he said, the smile still lingering in his voice.

Rosie blinked, staring at the tangled mess with a mix of incredulousness and skepticism. “That’s a rosebush?” He squinted as if looking harder would somehow reveal hidden blooms, but all he saw were branches that were anything but delicate.

“Mhm,” Crosby confirmed with a soft hum. He tilted his head and gave a wry grin. “I was there the day it was planted, you know.” Crosby’s voice had shifted, now tinged with wistfulness and fatigue.

Notes

“The Orderly Room with the circular Squadron insignia almost faded away, screwed to the left of the door and the rosebush that Major Cleven had planted almost two years before, now sprawling alongside the building. It had a rose on it this summer for the first time."
—an excerpt from “They Never Had it So Good: The Personal, Unofficial Story of the 350th Bombardment Squadron (H), 100th Bombardment Group (H) USAAF, 1942-1945” by Jack Sheridan, published in 1946

See the end of the work for more notes

The bush outside the 350th orderly room was a monstrous thing, a sprawling tangle of branches and thick stems. Its dark green leaves spread wide and unruly, with sharp, vicious thorns standing guard along its twisting limbs. It sprawled along the side of the building, winding its way into cracks and corners like it was trying to pull the structure into itself. Rosie had hardly paid it any mind, at least not until Crosby had pointed it out.

“My, has it grown,” Crosby spoke up from where leaned against the jeep waiting for Rosie to emerge, voice carrying a note of amusement.

“Huh?” Rosie paused.

Crosby looked pointedly behind him.

Rosie frowned, turning back to look at the gnarly shrub with its endless, jagged branches that created an intimidating, impenetrable mass.

Crosby chuckled lightly. “It’s a rosebush,” he said, the smile still lingering in his voice.

Rosie blinked, staring at the tangled mess with a mix of incredulousness and skepticism. “That’s a rosebush?” He squinted as if looking harder would somehow reveal hidden blooms, but all he saw were branches that were anything but delicate.

“Mhm,” Crosby confirmed with a soft hum. He tilted his head and gave a wry grin. “I was there the day it was planted, you know.” Crosby’s voice had shifted, now tinged with wistfulness and fatigue. There was a touch of embarrassment in the way he spoke, like he was half-aware of how much older he sounded, how much older he felt. Rosie caught the subtle change in Crosby’s face, the way his expression sagged under the strain of months spent flying mission after mission. He looked weathered, the hard lines of his face deepened by the toll that war had taken on him.

The dark circles beneath Crosby’s downcast eyes had only gotten worse with each sleepless night stacking on top of the last. His cap, the infamous “fifty-mission crush” that flyboys wore with pride, a badge of honor, hung limply from his head, offering none of the swagger it should have to a man with a resume like his, as though it too had long since absorbed as much of the burden as it could carry. It only echoed the exhaustion that had worn Crosby down, reflecting the hollowness the navigator had felt.

His entire uniform seemed to hang looser, the once-proud fit now almost baggy on his frame. The belt, which used to merely be a part of the uniform, now served its purpose. Seeing the veteran navigator in this light, in such a state, made Rosie pause. He couldn't help but wonder just how close to the edge Crosby has been.

Rosie recalled an occasion when Crosby, in a moment of intoxication, had made a darkly humorous comment in an exasperated tone. He had lamented that spending the rest of the war in the Stalag might have been easier than enduring the relentless strain they faced. Rosie had laughed, but looking at Crosby in his current state he was starting to think that Crosby might have genuinely believed that. Rosie, too, had to admit there may have been just an ounce of truth to that. The war had taken more from them than they would ever let on—and even more from Crosby than the navigator would ever admit.

A small consolation for Rosie was the assurance from others that despite how worn Crosby looked now, there had been a time just months prior when Crosby had appeared even worse. Then when Rosie returned with a broken arm and a bruised, battered body, the entire base was almost as relieved to have their Ol' Croz back as they were to welcome Rosie.

"I've uh-" Rosie cleared his throat, tearing his eyes away and glancing at the rosebush and then back at Crosby. "I've never seen any roses," he commented as he closed the distance between them, keeping his voice light with a slight grin tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"Major Cleven planted it," Crosby responded simply instead, as if that were the answer to his question. Rosie's smile softened even though Crosby continued to stare past him.

Rosie reached up a hand and cupped Crosby's jaw, his other hand splayed against Crosby's hip, thumb hooked on his belt. Their eyes met.

"They're okay," Rosie smiled reassuringly. A trail of blush bloomed on the navigator's face with every pass of Rosie's thumb over his cheek bone. "So are we," he insisted, squeezing his hip.

Crosby smiled, pushing up on his toes to press their lips together.

* * *

Buck leaned back against the bar, a smug smirk dancing across his lips. Bucky turned around and handed Buck a chilled Ginger Beer, taking a sip of his own drink. The pair gazed out across the room at all of the boys celebrating, the bar at their back. Bucky's gaze landed on Buck and he noticed his amusement.

"What's that look for?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. Buck looked at Bucky and then back out across the room. He raised his glass to his lips for a long sip and Bucky rolled his eyes, letting his eyes wander the room once more.

Buck reached out towards Bucky and used two fingers to pull Bucky's chin, directing his gaze. Bucky grinned and leaned in for a kiss, but Buck playfully pressed a finger to his lips, halting him.

"Nooo, John," he chuckled softly, his voice low. "Eleven o'clock," he murmured, nodding in that direction. Bucky huffed in mild frustration, leaning back as he took another sip. Curiosity piqued, he peered over his glass in the direction Buck indicated.

Crosby stood in a more secluded corner of the room, nursing a drink while a warm smile spread across his face as he observed the other flyboys dancing and reveling in the moment.

"Croz?" Bucky asked, turning to Buck.

"Shhh," Buck whispered, a conspiratorial glint in his eyes. "Just watch."

Bucky obliged, turning his gaze back to the navigator. Suddenly, Crosby's demeanor brightened. Rosie settled beside Crosby, leaning casually against the wall with his hands hidden behind his back. They exchanged a few words back and forth.

Then, with some flourish, Rosie revealed a single rose, extending it toward Crosby. Crosby's eyes widened in surprise. He was hesitant to take it, treating the rose as if it were a fragile treasure. He gingerly accepted it, bringing it close to his nose to inhale its fragrant scent. When he looked up, a radiant smile illuminated his face, his eyes glistening with unshed tears.

"Huh," Bucky murmured, a note of intrigue in his tone.

"Wait, is that from your rosebush?" he added, glancing back at Buck.

"Uh-huh," Buck nodded, eyes still trained on the unfolding scene. He

turned around, leaning his forearms against the bar. “Saw him pick it this mornin’.”

“Well, ain’t that sweet,” Bucky murmured under his breath as he turned to lean beside Buck, their shoulders pressed together. Bucky stole another glance over his shoulder at the pair.

Rosie now stood mere inches from the navigator, his hands resting on Crosby’s hips while one of Crosby’s arms was draped around Rosie’s neck. The other hand cradled the rose protectively against his chest.

“Just bloomed for the first time. That's what Lemmons said,” Buck continued, his eyes lingering on the two men, a faint smile tugging at the corner of his lips. Bucky, watching him, couldn’t help but notice the warmth in Buck’s expression.

“Waited for the war to be over before it bloomed, huh?” Bucky teased, amusement twinkling in his eyes.

“Awfully poetic, ain’t it?” Buck drawled softly, his voice filled with fondness.

End Notes

Title is from In Our Bedroom After the War by Stars.

When I wrote Rosie's "That's a rosebush??" line all I could hear was the Lorax in the 2016 movie being all like "That's a woman??" So yeah. I couldn't not share that.

Anyway, I don't know where this came from but it might just be one of my favorite things I've ever written. I've got more Harry Crosby stuff coming but in the mean time, please let me know what you think!!

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